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ABSTRACT

Transferred epithets, adjectives that appear to have been transferred from adverb to prenominal position (e.g., "I balanced a thoughtful lump of sugar..."), have been viewed as unanalyzable both grammatically and from the viewpoint of transformational derivation. However, another explanation is that these combinations show patterns reflecting human sensation. The patterns pair an adjective describing sensation with a noun representing the experiencer (e.g., an angry man), a behavior (e.g., a sad smile), a body part of the experiencer (e.g., a happy face), a message from the experiencer (e.g., a jealous letter), or less explicitly expressing the experiencer's role, a causer of sensation (e.g., a happy event), a time of sensation (e.g., a sad moment), or a place in which sensation occurs (e.g., an unhappy home). They reflect our experience that messages and body parts are natural mediators of emotions. Further, we expect predicating adjectives, particularly in attributive positions, to have a descriptive or characterizing function and we may adjust our interpretation of adjectives such as these by certain predictable strategies to make them descriptive. (MSE)

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A NERVOUS REPORT: THE TRANSFERRED EPITHET AND BODY LANGUAGE

Some ten years ago Robert A. Hall Jr (1973) drew our attention to a stylistic device which P.G. Wodehouse sometimes employed and which Hall calls the *transferred epithet*. Examples of this construction are:

(1) I balanced a thoughtful lump of sugar on the teaspoon (Joy in the Morning, 1946:Chapter 5)

(2) He was smoking a sad cigarette .... (Uneasy Money, 1917:Chapt. 9)

(3) She tapped Bruton Street with a testy foot ("The Amazing Hat Mystery" ca 1936)

(4) The first thing he did was to prod Jeeves in the lower ribs with an uncouth forefinger (Much Obliged, Jeeves, 1971:Chapter 4)

(5) ... I pronged a moody forkful ("Jeeves and the Impending Doom", ca 1926)

Hall observes that these adjectives appear to have been transferred from adverb position, modifying the verb of the clause, into prenominal position, ie *I thoughtfully balanced a lump of sugar - I balanced a thoughtful lump of sugar; He was sadly smoking a cigarette - He was smoking a sad cigarette* etc. These adverbs, in their turn, involve reference to the subject of the verb in each instance. Therefore it seems plausible to express these relationships by means of a number of transformations, viz: *I was thoughtful + I balanced a lump of sugar - I thoughtfully balanced a lump of sugar - I balanced a thoughtful lump of sugar.* There are, however, Hall points out, parallel constructions which we would not think of as containing transferred epithets, but accept as quite normal. Consider: *He uttered a surprised snort; She gave a sardonic laugh; I could not suppress a contemptuous sneer.* The sequence of transformations mentioned above does not explain why we find Wodehouse's phrases comic and unusual but not the examples just cited. Hall therefore comes to the conclusion that we cannot give a grammatical explanation of the stylistic effect of Wodehouse's examples, but have to explain

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them as manifesting semantic incongruity.

J. Levi (1975) and Ljung (1975) do not quite accept Hall's conclusion. They both suggest independent of each other that transferred epithets should indeed be derived transformationally from a deep structure involving a manner adverbial. They then proceed to account for the Wodehouse effect. Levi (1975:283) claims that it "lies in the juxtaposition of adjectives that can normally be used only to describe human feelings and activities, with head nouns that are neither animate nor nominalizations of "animate" activity". Ljung claims that the effect has to do with cognateness between the verb and the object of the clause in which the epithet occurs. Transferred epithets occur almost exclusively in object noun phrases. The more cognate this object is with the verb of the clause, the more acceptable it is to modify the object noun with an adjective that represents a manner adverbial. Thus, *to give or laugh a sardonic laugh* is a quite natural phrase since there is a high degree of cognateness between the noun *laugh* and the verb *laugh*. (Expressed in less scholarly terms: One can hardly "laugh anything" but a laugh.) If we return to examples 1 - 5, the underlined phrases in 2 - 4 are, according to Ljung, quite normal phrases. Their normalcy follows from the fact that there is a high degree of cognateness between the verb and the object in each case (ie between *smoke* and *cigarette*, *tap* and *foot*, *prod* and *forefinger*). The adjectives in the first and last examples, however, are strange because of the low degree of cognateness between *balance* and *lump of sugar* and between *prong* and *forkful*.

Having summarized previous accounts of the so called transferred epithet, I proceed to offer my own.

Let me start by listing a few adjectives involving reference to sensations: *angry*, *nervous*, *sad*, *happy*, *jealous*, *moody*, *hungry*. We would expect that these and synonymous adjectives should be able to modify all and only the nouns that denote entities that we think of as capable of the sensations implied. Indeed, it appears that any noun that we immediately accept as referring to an Experiencer can be modified by these adjectives: *an angry man*, *a nervous speaker*, *a sad child*, *a happy dog etc. etc.* These combinations could be said to adhere to the pattern Sensation-Experiencer (of sensation):

Pattern I: Sensation-Experiencer (of Sensation)

an angry man	*a sad child*
a nervous speaker	*a happy dog*

However, as Levi explicitly pointed out, we find it natural to combine these adjectives also with nouns that denote actions (a term I see fit to replace by the noun behaviour), for instance *sad smile*, *angry shout*, *nervous tremble*, *jealous stare*. These combinations could be said to adhere to the pattern Sensation-Behaviour (of Experiencer of Sensation):

Pattern II: Sensation-Behaviour (of Experiencer of Sensation)

a sad smile
an angry shout
a nervous tremble
a jealous stare

Levi does not explain, however, why we find these particular phrases normal and natural. My explanation is simply that this is so because they reflect our experience of real-world phenomena, ie that sensations may affect human and animal behaviour. Note, however, that they are only acceptable inasmuch as they do reflect what we judge to be natural cause-effect relations. That is to say, *a sad smile* strikes me as a perfectly natural combination, but *an uncouth smile* is less natural; likewise *a nervous tremble* is natural, but *a jealous tremble* is less so.

Hall, Levi and Ljung all recognize consciously or subconsciously the existence of the above two patterns. However, there are two other patterns relevant in this connection, viz:

Pattern III: Sensation-Body Part (of Experiencer of Sensation)

sad eyes
happy face
nervous hands
angry fist

Pattern IV: Sensation-Message (from Experiencer of Sensation)

jealous letter
angry telephone call
desperate note
furious article

The above phrases strike me as perfectly natural adjective noun combinations. Again, I explain this by claiming that they reflect our experience that messages and body parts (in particular eyes, but also hands and faces and voices, if we may class voice as a body part) are natural mediators of emotions. Moreover, we have noticed that sensations may affect the

appearance of certain body parts and the character of certain messages. Therefore the mention of sensations in connection with words denoting these entities may have descriptive force, which after all is what we require of *bona fide* adjectives. *Sad* in *sad eyes* informs us not only of the feelings of the possessor of the eyes but also of their appearance. Compare in this respect *sad* in *sad cigarette*, which says nothing about the cigarette as such.

Examining these four patterns, we find that the Experiencer is explicitly mentioned in pattern I, while in patterns II, III and IV he/she/it is implied in the manner I have indicated. That is to say, the Experiencer is the "executor" of the behaviour in pattern II, it is the possessor of the body part in pattern III, and it is the author of the message in pattern IV. If we paraphrase the example phrases, we find some other differences: The combinations in group I allow paraphrases involving the verb experience:

angry man:	"man experiencing anger"
sad child:	"child experiencing sadness"
nervous speaker:	"speaker experiencing nervousness"
happy dog:	"dog experiencing happiness"

The combinations in group II may be paraphrased either:

sad smile:	"the act of smiling sadly"
angry shout:	"the act of shouting angrily"
nervous tremble:	"the event of trembling nervously"
jealous stare:	"the act of staring jealously"

or:

sad smile:	"smile giving expression to/manifesting sadness"
angry shout:	"shout giving expression to/manifesting anger"
nervous tremble:	"tremble manifesting nervousness"
jealous stare:	"stare manifesting jealousy"

The combinations in groups III and IV both allow manifest in their paraphrases:

sad eyes:	"eyes manifesting sadness"
happy face:	"face manifesting happiness"
nervous hands:	"hands manifesting nervousness"[1]
angry fist:	"fist manifesting anger"[1]

Footnote 1: The adjectives in these two combinations could also be thought of as representing manner adverbials.

jealous letter:	"letter manifesting jealousy"
angry telephone call:	"telephone call manifesting anger"
desperate note:	"note manifesting desperation"
furious article:	"article manifesting fury"

I make this point to illustrate that adjectives containing reference to sensations may modify inanimate nouns without necessarily representing a manner adverbial, which was Levi's and Ljung's contention. There is, I maintain, a semantic difference between *a hasty letter* and *a jealous letter*. The adjective in the former phrase could be said to function like a manner adverbial, but hardly in the latter.

In order to sum up my explanation of the Wodehouse effect I need to return to examples (1) - (5) once again. The phrases in (3) and (4) could hardly be said to be startling examples of poetic licence. I connect this with the fact that they adhere to an established pattern, viz pattern III. The phrases in (1),(2) and (5) are more striking combinations of adjectives and nouns. I would like to explain this by the fact that they do not comply with any established pattern. Perhaps we can look upon *a sad cigarette* and *a thoughtful lump of sugar* as an extension of pattern III and *a moody forkful* as a version of pattern II.

My suggestion is in other words that there are certain established patterns of adjective-noun combinations. These patterns owe their existence to the fact that they reflect frequently observed, plausible real-life relations. If we abandon these patterns or if we use them to express relations that are not well-established or do not suggest characterizing features, we are likely to produce combinations that are felt to be strange, eg *happy ears, sad cigarette, nervous paper*.

Besides the four patterns: Sensation-Experiencer, Sensation-Behaviour, Sensation-Body Part, Sensation-Message, there are three other patterns involving adjectives denoting sensations which, for the sake of completeness, I would like to describe briefly.

I have suggested that patterns II, III and IV reflect cause-effect relations, ie we look upon the sensation denoted by the adjective in question as a Causer (either Effector or Affector to be precise). Frequently, however, sensations assume the opposite role, ie they are the result of some phenomenon, as in Pattern V below:

Pattern V: Sensation-Causer (of Sensation)

happy event
sad news
amazing statement
terrifying thought

Finally, it is possible to combine adjectives denoting sensations with nouns referring to periods of time or places. Consider:

Pattern VI: Sensation-Time (at which Sensation occurs/occurred)

sad moment
happy days
exciting morning

Pattern VII: Sensation-Place (at which Sensation occurs/occurred)

unhappy home
the happy hunting-grounds
sad place

The Experiencer is implied in patterns II - VII, which makes these patterns less straightforward and more prone to restrictions than pattern I. In patterns II - IV the Experiencer is normally a specific person, usually implied by the linguistic context which, in turn, probably affects the syntax of the clauses in which they occur. In patterns V - VII, the Experiencer is often unspecific and not necessarily "recoverable" from context.

There is more to say about these adjectives and patterns. For instance, not all adjectives denoting sensations may occur in all the patterns. *Angry* does not take part in patterns V, VI and VII, for example[2]. For reasons of space, however, I abstain from further comments. Instead I would like to devote the last minutes of my talk to discussing some matters of theoretical interest.

The subject matter of this paper has been the semantics of certain adjective-noun combinations. As I have tried to demonstrate, the interpretation of these structures naturally involves finding meaningful

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Footnote 2: A native speaker of English in the audience pointed out that he would find *an angry classroom* quite acceptable. I therefore concede that this claim is too strong and should be modified with the adverbial *normally*. On the other hand, Aijmer whose article "Emotional Adjectives" reached me after the presentation of this paper, provides some interesting figures concerning the use of *angry* that support my suggestion.

referents for them. Some linguists hold the view that since the meanings of complexes of lexical items depend to such a high degree on context and other non-linguistic factors, any attempt to predict these would be futile. Any system of rules in this connection would on closer inspection evaporate into the thin air of pragmatics. I concede that the semanticist must pay due consideration to pragmatic aspects of meaning but believe, nevertheless, that the manner in which we combine, for example, adjectives with nouns is not unpredictable and that we generally adhere to certain strategies. A theory as to what such a system of strategies would be like in the case of predicating adjectives is presented in Aarts and Calbert, Metaphor and Non-Metaphor. The Semantics of Adjective-Noun Combinations. All the patterns I have discussed above are in fact mentioned in this book. I have worked with their theories for some time now and can testify to their usefulness. They help create order and in this way provide the semanticist with an overview, which is important.

My plea this afternoon is, then, that pragmatic and systematic approaches should join forces and I would like to end by demonstrating that such a liaison may provide explanations for certain semantic phenomena. I said earlier that *sad* in *sad eyes* has descriptive force. I suggest that we expect predicating adjectives - particularly in attributive positions - to have this descriptive or characterizing function and that this expectation is so firm that it may induce us to adjust the interpretation of adjectives in certain manners so that they become descriptive. Let me exemplify. A number of semanticists have pointed out that certain adjectives contain a semantic element of degree. *Hot*, for example, is analysed "having high degree of heat" and *tall* "possessing great length" and *old* "possessing high age" etc. Similarly, Ljung noted in his thesis on denominal adjectives that *stony*, *bushy*, *rocky*, for instance, suggest paraphrases such as "containing stones, bushes, rocks" and not "containing a stone, a bush, a rock". However, the presence of these elements of degree is quite erratic, at least when they denote a high degree. Thus *old* in *The baby is three months old* does not suggest "high age"; *stony* in *a stony patch* could refer to a single stone. It therefore seems to me that the existence of these elements depends on whether or not they are needed to make the adjectives in question characterizing. If we need them, we add them. If we do not need them, we ignore them, so to say. The presence of the semantic element "good/nice" in the adjectives in the phrases, *tasty raspberries* and *shapely legs* is motivated for the same reason, I suggest.

In view of the crucial role that I assign to this characterizing force of the attributive predicating adjective, it is unfortunate that it is so difficult to offer a generally valid, precise description of what it involves. The following represents a first attempt:

a) An adjective has no characterizing force if it denotes a feature that the referent of the noun it modifies possesses by definition - or more or less so. Thus, *a female woman*, *wet water*, *a male king*, *a legged table*[3], *a furred cat*[3], strike us as strange. Exception: In certain contexts, however, we may see fit to remind our audience of some 'by-definition feature', eg: "Don't go so close to the hot fire!", ?"What we need is a strong, male king!"

b) If an adjective denotes a concrete possessed item, this item must be in direct contact with the possessor. Thus *a uniformed person* is understood to mean "a person who is wearing a uniform" and not "a person having a uniform/uniforms (in his closet)". This would explain why **a carred man*, **a many-toyed child*, **a lowered lady* are ungrammatical. Exceptions: *wealthy* and *rich*. (The functions of the adjectives in *the landed gentry* and *moneyed people* are classifying rather than characterizing). I am not certain that this restriction has anything to do with the characterizing function of adjectives. It may be a general restriction on adjectivalization in English.

c) We tend not to accept temporary and fortuitous states and actions as characterizing: **a sorry girl*, **a well man*, **a husband-waking wife* (This last example is from Bolinger (1967:6-7)). Present participles - for instance *moving* in *a moving man* - are often denied adjectival status for this reason.

Footnote 3: For some reason, *-ed* adjectives cannot be graded if they have as their base an unmodified concrete noun: **very bearded*, **very tailed*, **very roofed*. This explains why the characterizing power of *legged* and *furred* cannot be 'saved' by the addition of some element of degree. Cf. *a furry cat*, which is interpretable as "cat having much fur".

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